

POLI 2053 - 04: Introduction to Comparative Politics

Dr. Alex D. Cole

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[TR 12:00-1:15, Stubbs 116](#)

Virtual Office Hours MWF 12:30-2:30 PM (CST),
or by Appointment



“Though nothing will keep us together,
We can steal time, just for one day.”
-David Bowie, “Heroes.”

Overview

Introduction to Comparative Politics (POLI 2053) is a general ed course concerned with expositing the major concepts, schools of thought, and topics that make up the empirical and institutional study of politics within and across states. However, I would like to add that all these concepts possess a *theoretical foundation* contained in some of the great works of the philosophic tradition. This course incorporates theory, empirical research, and historical context in order to provide a holistic understanding of comparative politics both as it is practiced today by scholars and what it has meant historically. As a result, this course's reading materials are built around the great classics of the field. Naturally, some of these texts are somewhat outdated. Our task in the day-to-day of the course is to bring these up-to-date and learn together what they can teach us about living in a world defined by structure and power. With texts ranging from antiquity to post-modernity, together we can hopefully see how the study of politics *develops* and how it can be made *relevant* to our contemporary political and moral concerns.

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on the basis of five major requirements. The course will contain four "exams." The final and midterm will be written and "take-home." All others will be "multiple choice" and given physically. In order to encourage in-person attendance, a weekly quiz will be given (excluding weeks you have a test) that concern that week's readings and class discussion. All of these quizzes will be due at **5 PM each Sunday Night**. Quizzes will appear on Moodle. Quizzes will count for 15% of final grade. Multiple choice tests will each count 17.5%. A breakdown of the midterm and final follows:

Midterm: Students must create an **annotated bibliography** of scholarly sources on one of the topics covered in class (e.g., the state, political economy, institutions, nationalism, etc). I expect at least ten sources listed in Chicago format with half possessing a short paragraph or two that explains the article or book's importance to the study of Comparative Politics, its general thesis, and whether its claims are supported by the evidence and arguments provided. The goal of the assignment is to demonstrate one's ability to read a significant amount of scholarly material, discerning what is important on the subject, and presenting one's acquired knowledge in a way accessible and rigorous to both reader (me) and author (student). Full credit will be granted to bibliographies that show a strong command of the material and effort placed into the work. (2-3 pages, 25%).

Final: Students are to select an interview from Munck and Snyder's *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics* (ex: with James C. Scott, Adam Przeworski, Theda Scopol, etc.) and relate this interview to our in-class readings and discussions. Student must evaluate these scholars' claims on the basis of our in-class discussions and readings and conclude whether this scholar says anything constructive regarding the study comparative politics. Put another way: what does this scholar do well, what could improve their view of politics or way of thinking? Why or why not? Students are expected to use scholarly research to demonstrate their case. This assignment tests students' ability to read critically

and apply the text to existing knowledge, reach an original conclusion, and convey that conclusion in writing (3-4 pages, 25%).

NB: Both of these assignments are to use direct quotes and properly cited materials in Chicago or APA styles and submitted via Moodle in Word format. Please consult OWL Purdue for more information regarding proper citational styles and practices. **I will not** accept papers in .pdf format. I know the tricks, I read these papers for a living: **I know when you are trying to mess with the margins to make a minimum paper count.** I will simply not read these until you fix the margins and send them in the proper format. **I am very serious about this issue.** If you anticipate a late paper, please let me know **ahead of time** so that we may plan an alternative due date. Failure to provide a paper by that time will result in a severe penalty.

Breakdown of grades:

- Weekly quizzes (15%)
- Multiple Choice tests (17.5% each = 35%)
- Midterm (25%)
- Final (25%)

Extra Credit: On certain Saturdays during the semester, I will screen one of the following films over Zoom. If one attends these screenings, or watches the film themselves, and then *writes a short description of the film as it relates to the ideas in the course*, one will be granted five bonus points on a multiple-choice test, a midterm, or the final. NB: These cannot “stack.”

- Hiroshima, Mon Amour* by Alain Resnais
- The Lost Honor of Katherina Blum* by Volker Schlöndorff & Margarethe von Trotta
- Shin Gojira* by Hideaki Anno & Shinji Higuchi

Readings

Note: Readings subject to change.

Required Textbooks

- Dickovich & Eastwood, “Comparative Politics, Classic and Contemporary Readings.” Oxford University Press.
- Munck & Snyder, “Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics.” John Hopkins University Press.

An Introduction to an Introduction

- Resnais, “Night and Fog”* & Grass, “How I Spent the War”*

- Munck, "The Past and Present of Comparative Politics" from *Passion, Craft, and Method in Comparative Politics*
- Acemoglu & Robinson "Why Nations Fail"

The State

- Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I*
- Rousseau, *Second Discourse on Inequality**
- Bates, "Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development"

Nationalism

- Nietzsche, "Nations and Fatherlands" from *Beyond Good and Evil**
- Excerpt from Anderson, *Imagined Communities*
- Laitin, "Nations, States, and Violence."

Democracy & Dictatorship

- Aristotle, *Politics*, Books III & IV*
- Barrington Moore, Jr., "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World"
- Lijphart, "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies"
- Levitsky & Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism"

Constitutions & Institutions

- Madison, "Federalist No. 10"
- Elazar, "Exploring Federalism"
- Pitkin, "The Concept of Representation"

Political Parties

- Chhibber & Kollman, "The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States"
- Berman, "The Primacy of Economics versus the Primacy of Politics"*

Political Economy & The Welfare State

- Smith, "The Pin Factory" from *The Wealth of Nations**
- Marx, "The Working Day" from *Das Kapital**
- Polanyi, "The Hundred Years' Peace" from *The Great Transformation**
- Esping-Andersen, "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism."

Transition & Revolution

- Aristotle, *Politics*, Books V & VI*
- Scopol, "States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China."
- Kuran, "The Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989."

Coda

- Fisher, *Leaving the Vampire's Castle**
- Luxemburg, *Social Reform or Revolution?**

*Available on Moodle.

NB: Both of these books are available at the LSU Bookstore at Barnes and Noble, but can also be found on Amazon, Powell Books, Book Depository, eBay, and the press websites themselves. I apologize for the cost of these books, but I find they contain the most accessible and high-level scholarship available in one single place. I have aimed to provide a good balance of free and "paid" sources. If you have difficulty procuring any of these materials, please let me know so we can work something out.

Rules and Stipulations

This course meets twice weekly from 12:00-1:15. Although, I do not take formal attendance, **your physical presence is highly recommended to succeed in this course.** This course is also **very text-heavy and discussion-heavy.** Please make an effort to prepare the readings ahead of time with questions in mind. Failure to participate in class will make it much more difficult and awkward to maintain a collaborative learning environment, so do make the effort. Furthermore, this course does not reward everyone's "opinion" equally. It rewards having an opinion *informed by the readings and student research.* I will say "no" occasionally in response to student answers when they miss the mark. This is not meant to discourage students, but to bring the discussion closer to the truth, or what the truth may most likely be.

This course will occur in the first semester after campus has officially reopened and will held entirely in-person. However, in the case a new wave of infections occurs, I am prepared to take this course on Zoom. Therefore, students should also prepare for this scenario and have Zoom installed on their personal devices at the very least. I also implore students to **follow proper safety protocol and social distancing guidelines.** Masks are *required* indoors, and I **will not** admit students unwilling to mask up to class. Please use common sense and courtesy in class.

Further, this past year has been difficult for all of us. As a result, I know that it may be difficult or impossible to make certain deadlines, especially as we transition back to

something similar to “normality,” so I am willing to be fairly lenient about deadlines especially if **you let me know ahead of time that you are having difficulties**. I am available by office hours and by email if you need to speak with me privately. Still, I implore you to use discretion when contacting me. Do not overshare; only tell me what is absolutely necessary. This precaution is undertaken in order to protect the sanctity of the classroom and the teacher-student dichotomy. Again, use common sense and refrain from disclosing anything you don’t want others to know.

Comparative Politics is a fascinating and important subject that I have engaged in seriously for the past few years of my life. But it can also be very disturbing. Certain readings and films assigned have very evocative images involving genocide, violence, sexuality, nudity, and strong language. If any of you take offense to or are disturbed by this content, please contact me and we can discuss these issues in a private, safe, and calm manner.

ADA Compliance

The University is committed to making reasonable efforts to assist individuals with disabilities in their efforts to avail themselves of services and programs offered by the University. To this end, Louisiana State University will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with documented qualifying disabilities. If you have a disability and feel you need accommodations in this course, you must present a letter to me from Disability Services in 115 Johnston Hall, indicating the existence of a disability and the suggested accommodations.

LSU Integrative Curriculum Statement

Integrated learning allows students to make simple connections among ideas and experiences and across disciplines and perspectives. The LSU Integrative Learning Core (ILC) curriculum is designed to develop student abilities to transfer their learning to new situations, and demonstrate a sense of self as a learner. A fundamental goal of the ILC is to foster students’ practical and intellectual capacities associated with integrative learning in preparation for high competence and functionality in their post-baccalaureate careers. This course fulfills the BOR Area of *Social/Behavioral Sciences* and provides students experience with the ILC proficiency of *Global Learning*.